

How I Nearly Killed My Wife

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“**C**all Life Flight,” the paramedic said, as my heart began to sink. I could not believe what was happening—everything had gone wrong, very wrong, very fast.

It was a beautiful, cool, summer evening in Arkansas—a perfect day to enjoy a ride on my new motorcycle. It took some doing, but I had convinced my wife to accompany me. Once she had swapped the shorts she was wearing for a pair of jeans, we donned our helmets and hit the road.

After only a month of riding an old Kawasaki 750cc, I had realized I was hooked—I had to have a bigger motorcycle, whether I was ready for it or not. A 1500cc Suzuki Cruiser was my bike of choice. After putting a grand total of 92 miles on the new bike, I felt confident enough to handle anything. “I know what I’m doing,” I assured myself as we left that evening.

The ride was awesome: a winding country road with the woman I love and my new bike. This was living! After leaning into a few curves and accelerating, my wife asked, “Do we need to lean over so much and go so fast? It scares me.” We only were going about 40 mph, so I really didn’t give her concerns much consideration. Instead, I reminded myself that I knew what I was doing.

The first sign of trouble came when we decided to return home. Turning this bike around was a lot harder than I had expected. It wobbled a couple of times—to the point I almost lost it—but we eventually got headed in the right direction. After a quick analysis, I again concluded that I knew what I was doing.

On our trip out, we had gone up a small hill—the same one we now were going down. As we approached the crest, I remembered a sharp bend just over the top, but it was too late. I had gunned the engine, which brought us to about 50 mph—no problem for an experienced biker, but I just had realized I really didn’t know what I was doing.

I leaned into the turn and tried to slow down by using my front brakes. Big mistake! The squeal of the rubber trying to hold onto the road is a sound I never will forget. A combination of improper braking and loose gravel on the road caused us to “high-side,” which means we flipped over the top of the bike. Seven hundred pounds of metal now was skidding down the road in our direction. Miraculously, the bike missed us.

The Marine in this story was riding two-up with his wife but not on the make of motorcycle pictured here. *[A subject-matter expert has assured me the operator in this photo is wearing a pair of approved riding boots.—Ed.]*



Photo by Kinney Jones
Reprinted courtesy motorcycledaily.com

Sea&Shore

As I slid down the road, I could see my wife tumbling, rolling and finally skidding to a halt. By the time I was able to get up and reach her, she already had begun to cry. She couldn't move her legs, she was disoriented, and she was having trouble breathing. All I cared about was that she was alive. About five minutes passed before a car approached, and the driver called 911.

The next few minutes went fast. The paramedics arrived and quickly determined she needed serious help. I only could watch helplessly as they put her on a back board, secured her head between two blocks, then loaded her into the ambulance and sped toward a waiting Life Flight helicopter. She was taken to a hospital more than 75 miles away. Meanwhile, the highway patrolman, who had responded to the 911 call, took me to a local hospital, where I was treated for mild road rash on my arms and other minor injuries and then released.

When I arrived at the hospital where my wife was, doctors already had determined the extent of

her injuries, starting with six broken ribs, a broken shoulder blade, and broken collarbone—all on her left side. The second digit on her right thumb also was shattered, and her right kneecap was broken in three places. My wife spent the next two weeks in the hospital, undergoing surgery to repair her thumb and knee. Two months of physical therapy followed this treatment.

I escaped with the road rash on both arms, a cracked knuckle on my left ring finger, and the guilt of what my arrogance had caused. Eventually, my wife made a full recovery. However, this story could have ended very differently.

The crash had destroyed her full-face helmet; the visor was scratched so badly you couldn't see through it anymore. The chin guard showed deep scars where she had slid across the ground, and the back of the helmet had a dent the size of a quarter. Without the helmet, she likely would have suffered fatal head injuries.

I have read many stories about motorcycle crashes, and most of them involve the same basic ingredients: a young person, a sport bike, and a lot of speed. I'm not young, I ride a cruiser, and I was operating at the posted speed limit; however, I still found myself in a bad situation.

Many things could have prevented this crash, among them: slowing down, riding according to the road conditions, not carrying a passenger, and more experience. If we had taken the time to put on riding jackets and pants with pads, the injuries would have been less severe. Since the incident, I have purchased a new bike and always wear all my safety gear. I also have taken and passed the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's riding course.

This mishap didn't cost me much money, no citations were issued, and the insurance company paid off the bike. But, I nearly lost the only thing that really matters to me: my wife! 

